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AUTHOR Rohr, Michael E.
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ABSTRACT

An overview of the history of adolescent runaway behavior indicates that it has become a social and psychological problem of significant proportions. This study investigated the use of a personality measure that was hypothesized to be representative of a cluster of behaviors associated with running away. The study also sought to determine a predictive equation by comparing a group of adolescent runaways (N=61) to two other criterion groups: a maladjusted sample (N=59) and a control sample (N=60). In addition, it was hypothesized that there would be differences between the samples and that selected variables would distinguish between the groups. The standardized personality measure used was the short form of the Personality Inventory for Children-Revised (PIC-R). The findings indicated that the PIC-R is an extremely effective personality measure. This instrument's ability to conceptually represent the behavior and personality problems of runaway adolescents is excellent. Its utility is further enhanced by its sensitivity in discriminating criterion groups. This sensitivity is exceptional because of the actuarial interpretive system associated with this instrument, which enables the PIC-R to detect the presence or absence of psychopathology. It is recommended that, since more psychologically disturbed youth are seeking services at runaway programs and that since the PIC-R is able to detect psychopathology in the runaway adolescent, mental health services be provided to the adolescent and his/her family on the agency's premises. (LLL)

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Personality Profile of Adolescent Runaways

[Michael E. Rohr]

Abstract

The study investigated the use of a personality measure that was hypothesized to be representative of a cluster of behaviors associated with running away. This study also sought to determine a predictive equation by comparing a group of adolescent runaways to two other criterion groups: a maladjusted sample and a control sample. In addition, it was hypothesized that there would be differences between the samples and that selected variables would distinguish between the groups. Based upon the findings, a personality profile of adolescent runaways was developed and recommendations for runaway programs and future research were made.

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Nature and scope. An overview of the history of adolescent runaway behavior indicates that it has become a social and psychological problem of significant proportions. Estimates of runaway behavior range from 2 to 4 million per year with approximately three percent of American families experiencing a runaway episode each year (Garbarino, 1986).

Runaway behavior has been defined as a behavioral manifestation of psychopathology. Recent research has indicated that this behavior has become more indicative of psychopathology than previously thought (Norey & Donohue, 1985). However, very little of the recent research had used a typical standardized personality assessment instrument that was representative of the apparent psychopathology associated with the adolescent runaway. The National Network of Runaway and Youth Services (1985) survey indicated that some of the most frequently cited presenting problems of runaway youth were: depression, alcohol usage, drug usage, physical abuse, sexual abuse, suicidal tendencies, and severe psychological problems. The research that discriminated runaways from non-runaways and also had reported classification rates measured discriminate variables such as: self-esteem and perceptions of parental positivity (Englander, 1984); peer relationships, parents' marital relationship and family constellation (Gilchrist, 1984); school problems, neglect, abuse, bad influences (Barber & Hosch, 1983); and delinquency (Linden, 1980). A review of runaway research also indicated that there were

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methodological problems, and that conceptualization of the runaway phenomenon as a holistic personality syndrome had not been presented. Evidence of a personality assessment instrument that was representative of the behaviors characteristic of running away and had discriminatory power was needed.

Sample. Three sample groups were used in the investigation. The runaway sample was composed of the residents who resided at the Memphis, Tennessee Family Link/Runaway House between 1986 and 1988 and whose custodian (primarily female) completed the Personality Inventory for Children - Revised. The total runaway sample was 61.

The control sample consisted of 60 adolescent subjects, male and female, age 13 through 17. The subjects were members of various church youth groups and had never run away from home nor had seen a mental health professional.

The maladjusted sample was a random sample of 59 PIC-R protocols of maladjusted adolescents aged 13 through 17. These 59 protocols were from a larger sample of 1226 subjects seen at an outpatient clinic in Detroit, Michigan for problematic behavioral and emotional adjustment. All the subjects in this sample had DSM-III diagnoses. However, for the purposes of this study, any subjects who had the diagnosis of conduct disorder were excluded from this sample because one of the criteria for the diagnosis of conduct disorder is running away. To eliminate this possible

confounding variable, those subjects were not used as part of the random sample.

Design and analysis. This study used an *ex post facto* design. Selected variables, which were scales of the PIC-R, were used to determine if, in a linear combination, they could discriminate between the criterion groups: an adolescent control sample, an adolescent maladjusted sample, and an adolescent runaway sample. The discriminating variables were: Adjustment, Achievement, Depression, Family Relationships, Delinquency, and Social Skills. Discriminate analysis was used to accomplish this study.

Instrument. The standardized personality measure used in this study was the short form of the Personality Inventory for Children - Revised. It is a 280, true-false item personality inventory with 16 profile scales plus four factor scales. One screening scale and five clinical scales were used because they represented the characteristics associated with adolescent runaway behavior. Those scales were: Adjustment, Achievement, Depression, Family Relationships, Delinquency, and Social Skills, respectively.

Research questions. This study addressed two research questions:

1. Could male runaways be discriminated from a male control sample and a male maladjusted sample on a personality inventory?

2. Could female runaways be discriminated from a female control sample and a female maladjusted sample on a personality inventory?

Hypotheses and findings. Three null hypotheses were generated from the research questions. The hypotheses and related findings were as follows:

Ho1: There is no difference between males and females, on selected personality scales of the Personality Inventory for Children - Revised (Adjustment, Achievement, Depression, Family Relations, Delinquency, Social Skills), within a sample of adolescent runaways, a maladjusted adolescent sample, and a control sample.

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to determine if there were significant differences ($p < .05$) within each group due to gender. These results indicated that within each of the three criterion groups (control, runaway, and maladjusted) on each scale there was not a significant difference ($p > .05$) between the male and female subjects. Analysis also indicated that between the three groups there were significant differences ($p < .05$). This difference was probably due to the combining of the three groups and due to the control group's lower mean scores.

Due to there being no significant differences between male and female subjects within each of the three criterion groups, the male and female subjects in each group were merged. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Ho2: There is no difference on selected personality scales of the Personality Inventory for Children - Revised (Adjustment, Achievement, Depression, Family Relations, Delinquency, Social Skills) among a sample of adolescent runaways, a maladjusted adolescent sample, and an adolescent control sample.

A one-way analysis of variance and Scheffe's post-hoc analysis indicated the following: that the control sample was significantly different ($p < .05$) from the runaway and maladjusted samples and that the runaway and maladjusted samples were not significantly different ($p > .05$) from each other on the variables Adjustment, Depression, Family Relations, and Social Skills, but significantly different ($p < .05$) on the Delinquency variable. The second null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

The findings of the analysis of the first two hypotheses indicated that it was expeditious to combine the runaway and maladjusted samples and calculate a step-wise discriminate analysis in order to try and predict membership into one of two groups, a control sample or a runaway/maladjusted sample.

Ho3: The Personality Inventory for Children - Revised variables (Adjustment, Achievement, Depression, Family Relations, Delinquency, Social Skills) will not predict membership in one of two groups, a control sample or a runaway/maladjusted sample.

The results of the step-wise discriminate analysis indicated that five variables, Adjustment, Family Relations, Depression, Delinquency, and Social Skills, significantly distinguished ($p < .05$) between the two criterion groups. In addition, cross-validation application of the discriminate function also significantly predicted criterion group membership. The third null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to use a personality measure that was representative of a cluster of behaviors associated with running away and to determine a predictive equation by comparing a group of adolescent runaways to two other criterion groups: a maladjusted (psychiatric) sample and a control sample whose subjects had not run away nor had ever been referred to a mental health professional for psychological problems.

Adolescent runaway personality profile. Five scales of the PIC-R were found that are predictive variables representative of the behaviors associated with adolescent runaways. While the literature on adolescent runaway behavior had been discordant in its presentation and representation of runaway behavior, these five predictive variables have been able to discriminate between a runaway sample, a maladjusted sample, and a control sample. An interpretation of the corresponding mean scores associated

with the predictive variables (scales) is necessary in order to conceptualize runaway behavior as a personality profile.

Lachar and Gdowski (1979) have developed an actuarial system designed to render interpretative hypotheses or rather assign behavioral correlates to PIC-R T-scores. The actuarial assessment system is essentially a "cook-book" approach to the interpretation to the PIC-R. Differing behavioral correlates are associated with ranges of scores. For instance, with the Adjustment scale the same interpretation is given to any scale score 60 and above. Whereas, with the Delinquency scale differing interpretations are given to scale scores between 80-89T, 90-99T, greater than 99T and greater than 109T. By applying this PIC actuarial system to the derived scale scores, via the tested hypotheses, a personality profile of the adolescent runaway evidences itself when compared to a control sample and a runaway/maladjusted sample.

Adjustment. When interpreting the PIC-R, the Adjustment scale is used as a psychological screening measure for identifying children who are in need of psychological evaluation. Since the runaway sample and the maladjusted sample were not significantly different ($p < .05$) from each other they received the same actuarial interpretation:

> The description of this child's behavior suggests that a psychological/psychiatric evaluation may assist in the remediation of current problems. (Lachar & Gdowski, 1979, p. 90)

If psychopathology is present, as Riemer (1940), Jenkins (1969) and National Network of Runaway Youth Services (1985) believe, then a psychological/psychiatric evaluation is indicated.

Achievement. The Achievement scale was developed to assist in identifying children whose academic achievement was below expectancy. On this scale, the runaway and maladjusted samples were not significantly different ($p < .05$) and received the same actuarial interpretation:

> Inventory responses suggest the possibility of poor school performance and associated academic retardation; teacher observation of limited concentration and difficulty in completion of classroom assignments may be associated with below age expectation performance in reading, mathematics, or spelling. (Lachar & Gdowski, 1979, p. 90)

This outcome and interpretation is consistent with Phillip's (1976) findings that the runaway repeater girl has a pattern of repeated grade retention and low achievement, and this study indicates boys evidence the same pattern.

Depression. The Depression scale reflects childhood depression. Since the runaway sample and the maladjusted sample were not significantly different ($p < .05$) from each other, they received the same actuarial interpretation:

> Similar children are often described as sad or unhappy; their dispositions are often characterized by frequent mood changes which may occur without apparent cause; frequent periods of crying or isolation may be characteristic. (Lachar & Gdowski, 1979, p. 93)

This outcome and interpretation supports the National Network of Runaway Youth Services (1985) survey indicating that the primary presenting problem was depression. That runaways are depressed was also found by Scalf (1978).

Family relations. The Family Relations scale reflects a measure of family effectiveness and cohesion. Since the runaway sample and the maladjusted sample were not significantly different ($p < .05$) from each other, they received the same actuarial interpretation:

> The home is likely to reflect the impact of divorce or separation and may be characterized by instability and conflict; parental inconsistency in setting limits is suggested; the resulting parent/child interactions may contribute to the development of child behavior problems. (Lachar & Gdowski, 1979, p. 94)

Ackerman's (1980) findings of the home being disrupted due to death, divorce, or separation, and Adler's (1980) finding that adolescent runaways felt rejected by their parents was supported by this study's findings. This study further supports Blood & D'Angelo's (1974) finding that adolescent runaways believe their home to be conflictual and intolerable.

Social skills. The Social Skills scale measures the various characteristics that reflect effective social relations in childhood. On this scale, while significant differences ($p < .05$) occurred, the mean scores for the groups were low and not actuarially interpretable (Lachar & Gdowski, 1979). That is, a statistical difference ($p < .05$) was found, but the scores did not achieve the cutoff point

which would yield an actuarial interpretation. Therefore, because the Social Skills scale could not be interpreted, it is not included in the personality profile of the adolescent runaway.

Delinquency. The Delinquency scale was developed to measure the behavior characteristics of delinquents and to be a diagnostic aid in identifying delinquent children. While both the runaway and maladjusted samples were significantly different ($p < .05$) from the control sample, they were also significantly different ($p < .05$) from each other. The runaway sample had a higher mean score than the maladjusted sample. The Delinquency subscale illustrates a distinct difference between the runaway and maladjusted samples. The actuarial interpretation for the runaway and maladjusted samples were the same initially. This is because, higher cut-off scores subsume the interpretive behavioral correlates of the lower cut-off scores. On this scale the runaway sample had a higher cut-off score making it similar to the maladjusted sample for interpretive purposes:

> A disregard for rules and societal expectation is likely to be evidenced by behavior displayed at both home and school; similar children may express a dislike for school and demonstrate a hostile, defiant response to school personnel; current behavior is likely to reflect impulsivity, poor judgement or unmodulated hostility; an antisocial adjustment may be suggested by such symptoms as lying, stealing, associated with similar troubled children, or by an established tendency to blame others for current problems. (Lachar & Gdowski, 1979, p.95)

However, since the runaway sample had a higher cut-off score, this sample has an additional actuarial interpretation which distinguishes the runaway sample from the maladjusted sample:

> A characterological disorder may be suggested by such symptoms as lying, stealing, problematic sexual behavior and group delinquent activities. (Lachar & Gdowski, 1979, p. 95)

Other researchers (Riemer, 1940; Blood & D'Angelo, 1974; and Linden, 1980) have found delinquent type beha iors associated with adolescent runaways. Edelbrock (1980) found stealing outside the home was associated with adolescent runaways. School behavior problems (Gutierres & Reich, 1981) and truancy and negative attitudes toward school (Nye, 1980) were consistent findings of runaways. Previous research is supportive of this study's findings that a characterological disorder is associated with adolescent runaways.

In summary, what distinguishes the adolescent runaway from a maladjusted adolescent (psychiatric outpatient) is that the runaway may have a character disorder while the maladjusted youth does not. The American Psychiatric Association (1975) defines character disorder as:

> A personality disorder manifested by a chronic and habitual pattern of reaction that is maladaptive in that it is relatively inflexible, limits the optimal use of potentialities, and often provokes the very counter-reaction from the environment that the subject wishes to avoid. (p. 31)

The possible presence of a personality disorder, which distinguishes the runaway sample from the maladjusted sample, is indicative of a serious psychopathology. This finding is consistent with the National Network of Runaway Youth Services (1985) survey finding that a severe psychological problem is one of the presenting problems of runaway youth.

While the predictive validity of the five variables in linear combination was objectively verified by the 96.83% rate of correct classification and the cross-validation 93.02% rate of correct classification, some caution should be used in generalizing these findings. Random sampling did not occur for all three groups; thus external validity may be compromised. Generalizing these findings to other groups should reflect this limitation.

Summary. The findings of this study indicate that the PIC-R is an extremely effective personality measure. This instrument's ability to conceptually represent the behavior and personality problems of runaway adolescents is excellent. Its utility is further enhanced by its sensitivity in discriminating criterion groups. This sensitivity is exceptional because of the actuarial interpretive system associated with this instrument. The refinement of this instrument, due to the actuarial interpretive system, is what enables the PIC-R to detect the presence or not of psychopathology.

Recommendations

The findings in this study support several recommendations.

1. The PIC-R, as a personality measure, is extremely reflective of the behaviors associated with adolescent runaways. Its power to discriminate the presence of psychopathology or not is indicative of its usefulness to runaway programs. The findings of this research indicate that psychopathology was present in runaways tested in this study. Based on this finding, an in-house psychological assessment using the PIC-R procedure should be developed to enhance treatment plan formulation. This diagnostic service could greatly enhance professional credibility - especially for referral purposes.

2. The survey by the National Network of Runaway and Youth Services (1985) indicated that the runaway shelters are seeing more youth with more mental health problems than previously. The PIC-R provides validity to the survey's findings. It is recommended that, since more psychologically disturbed youth are seeking services at runaway programs and that since the PIC-R is able to detect psychopathology in the runaway adolescent, mental health services be provided to the adolescent and his/her family on the agency's premises (Chwast, 1978). It is recommended that these runaway programs consider hiring trained mental health professionals due to the mental health problems likely to be encountered in such settings. In general,

current typical runaway program staff do not possess these qualifications. If mental health services are provided by less qualified agency staff, the agency runs the risk of malpractice by misdiagnosing, not providing qualified practitioners, and not providing appropriate treatment programs. If in-house services cannot be provided then the programs should network with community mental health resources, both public and private, in order to meet the youth's mental health needs.

3. Mental health services provided to adolescents can be conceptualized on a least-to-most-restrictive continuum: outpatient mental health services, day treatment programs (partial-hospitalization), and psychiatric (inpatient) hospitalization. Access to the different services is, at least, dependent upon diagnosis of psychopathology. Results obtained from PIC-R runaway profiles indicates that some runaway's psychological profiles can be classified or typed into a mental health outpatient group (Lachar, 1990). Taxonomic or typological systems on runaways have been historically inadequate. Prior taxonomic systems have been criticized for the following reasons: (1) The researchers used an "intuitive" based approach rather than an objective statistical multivariate taxonomic method; (2) The samples have been extremely limited, small, and basically nonrepresentative; (3) The "descriptive domain" has been narrow; researchers use different sets of variables and therefore reach a different taxonomic system; and (4) The

systems have not been validated or tested for reliability (Brennan et al., 1978). A typology or taxonomic system on runaways is suggested here that is based upon the degree of psychopathology present. The adolescent runaway's mental health needs could be met by one of the providers on the continuum of mental health services. Adolescent runaways are classified or typed based upon the mental health services required; either outpatient services, day treatment services, or inpatient hospitalization services. Concomitant with this taxonomic system is that much effort needs to be placed in the area of diagnosing adolescent runaways.

4. Future research should include the use of discriminant analysis with additional comparison groups to investigate the utility of the suggested typology based upon the continuum of services. This research should focus on the continued use of the PIC-R in establishing personality profiles of select criterion groups. These criterion groups should represent the common presenting problems that were found in the survey by the National Network of Runaway Youth Services (1985). The criterion groups are depressed/non-suicidal, depressed/suicidal, physically abused, sexually abused, alcohol and drug dependant, and investigate completely "severe psychological problems". The criterion group, "severe psychological problems", could be operationally defined as those runaways who have been

admitted to psychiatric inpatient hospitals immediately following a runaway episode.

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